

New Directions for Behavioral Interventions

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Current behavioral and counseling treatments for tobacco use are highly similar to ones developed for addictive disorders more than 30 years ago. The basic treatment elements include social support and problem-solving strategies. While these treatment elements are effective versus no treatment, there is a great need for new behavioral approaches to tobacco intervention. These treatments are ineffective with most smokers, they may be losing their efficacy over time, and we don't know how and why they work.

New directions for behavioral interventions can be gleaned from basic research on the nature of the core problem (i.e., the causal determinants of relapse and from basic behavioral and cognitive models of behavior control/change). Research shows that tobacco abstinence creates an unusual motivational and affective state. Abstinence unleashes escalating, sustained, or high levels of withdrawal and craving; it amplifies withdrawal/craving reactions to stressors and temptation events; and smokers typically relapse in the context of "hot" information processing. Increased knowledge about the effects of abstinence suggests new approaches to treatment. At present, the quitting smoker is thrown into the breach (abstinence) with little relevant experience. Training is done in the nondeprived state and care is taken to ensure that abstinence is abrupt.